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INFO RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA IMMEDIATE 1421
RUEHPB/AMEMBASSY PORT MORESBY IMMEDIATE 1014
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RUEHNZ/AMCONSUL AUCKLAND IMMEDIATE 0233
RUEHDN/AMCONSUL SYDNEY IMMEDIATE 0634
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SUVA 000539

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [ASEC](#) [CASC](#) [FJ](#)
SUBJECT: FIJI MILITARY COMMANDER ANNOUNCES COUP

REF: SUVA 538 (AND PREVIOUS)

Classified By: Amb. Dinger. Sec. 1.4 (B,D).

Summary

1. (C) RFMF Commander Bainimarama held a media conference at 6 p.m. to announce that he has "stepped into the shoes of the President" under the "doctrine of necessity" and is invoking the Fiji Constitution's "reserve powers" to remove PM Qarase and install an interim government. An hour earlier, Bainimarama briefed the Defense Attaches in Suva similarly (septel). Bainimarama claimed Fiji is deteriorating so horribly that the RFMF must act to save it. He described a legal justification that our legal contacts say won't fly. He has dismissed all Ministers, but the rest of government can still function, pending creation of an interim government. Bainimarama said his vision is a multi-cultural government overseeing a prosperous future. He said the RFMF and police are already working as a team (something the Police deny). Bainimarama pleaded for understanding from the international community. Australia and New Zealand have already publicly announced their intention to impose tough sanctions. End summary.

An unhappy Commodore

2. (U) In a media conference at 6 p.m., Bainimarama described RFMF anguish over the deteriorating state of Fiji, with the Qarase Government unable to make decisions and wrongheaded in the decisions it has made. He referred specifically to the controversial bills that have been his frequent themes, his unsuccessful efforts to lobby Qarase, and his unhappiness that the PM had tried to remove him as Commander and had tried to create dissension in the ranks.

Absent Presidential blessing: doctrine of necessity

3. (U) Bainimarama obliquely acknowledged President Iloilo's public announcement in the afternoon opposing RFMF unconstitutional plans (see reftel). He blamed Vice President Madraiwiwi for unduly pressuring the President, and said, given the President's stance, there was a "stalemate." He said the RFMF believes in the Constitution and wants a constitutional resolution of the crisis. Citing legal precedents from Fiji, Australia, and Pakistan, Bainimarama said he must step into the shoes of the President to invoke the Constitution's reserve powers under the "doctrine of necessity" and to act in this "unusual situation not envisioned by the framers." He said the Constitution will remain in place, except for those portions that are affected by the doctrine of necessity.

Ministers out; rest of government to function

¶4. (U) Bainimarama said Government Ministers will have one month to vacate their official residences and will receive one month severance pay; but none will be arrested...so long as they do not interfere. The judiciary and government in general will still function. Tomorrow, Bainimarama will call in CEOs (the senior civil servants in the bureaucracy) and instruct them to run their ministries until the interim government is formed.

An interim government soon; eventual elections

¶5. (U) Bainimarama said, with his Presidential powers, he is dismissing the PM and appointing an interim PM, Jone Baravilala Senilagakali, an elderly medical doctor who has military connections. Senilagakali is to dissolve Parliament, pending formation of an interim government. Bainimarama said he has no particular names in mind for the interim government but will seek expressions of interest. In the short term, he said he will appoint a military council of advisors. Bainimarama plans to call on the Great Council of Chiefs to re-appoint President Iloilo who will then formally appoint the caretaker government. New democratic elections would follow, once necessary "adjustments" are made.

A glorious and safe future

¶6. (U) Bainimarama said he will ensure Fiji has a multi-cultural government that cares for all the people and will respect international human-rights conventions. He urged all in Fiji to remain calm. He said the military and police are now working together and are setting up a Joint

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Command Center to coordinate their security activities. (The Police leadership has flatly denied all this to us.) Bainimarama said check points around the country would remain for five days or so, and military patrols would be more noticeable, but there would be no curfew. He warned anyone intending "illegal activities" not to do so.

A plea for international understanding

¶7. (U) Bainimarama pleaded for the international community to attempt to learn about and understand the current situation in Fiji before taking any actions.

Comment

¶8. (C) Bainimarama's speech writer clearly had to do a rapid rewrite after President Iloilo announced this p.m. (ref A) that he strongly opposes the RFMF actions. We are aware that some of Bainimarama's behind-the-scenes backers are in the judiciary. They did their best to make a silk purse out of a sow's ear. The legal experts we have talked with in Fiji don't accept for a minute that the RFMF can foment a crisis and then claim "doctrine of necessity" to remove the PM. Fiji's Constitution is clear on the very limited circumstances in which a PM can be removed. This is not one of them.

¶9. (C) The meeting Bainimarama announced with Government CEOs tomorrow will be an early test of how pliable people will be.

Only a couple of days ago, all CEOs reportedly met and decided unanimously to refuse to assist if the RFMF were to conduct a coup. The approach of the police will be interesting, too. As noted in para 6, Police leaders have denied undertaking the cooperative process with the RFMF that Bainimarama described. How the general public, especially the ethnic-Fijian public reacts in coming days will be a key factor as well. Bainimarama's request for understanding from the international community is certain to be ignored. Australia and New Zealand today already made clear their disgust with the coup and their intention to impose tough sanctions. Per Ref A, we urge Washington to join that chorus

as soon as possible.
DINGER